

# Owen J. Roberts

Chairman (Council President), First Milwaukie Common (City) Council  
Father of Mayor Fred Roberts and City Recorder Ellen Martin

---



**1855-1905** 🐾 Councilor Owen J. Roberts' parents were from Wales, in the United Kingdom, and had immigrated to the State of Wisconsin by the time of his birth in 1855. He was trained as a blacksmith and owned a blacksmith shop in Minneapolis, Minnesota prior to moving west to Milwaukie, Oregon where he also owned a blacksmith shop. He married his wife Margaret sometime in the early 1880s, and over twenty years of marriage they would have five children. Eventually, Owen would serve as Chief Blacksmith and Foreman at the Oregon Water Power & Railway Company car shops, which operated the Portland to Oregon City trolley line. According to the 1900 census, Councilor Roberts' occupation was listed as 'suburban property developer', so like many men of his generation he likely had several different occupations, often at the same time. The Roberts family resided on Minthorn Hill, near the corner of today's Harrison Street and 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, and would travel to Portland on Sundays to attend church.

In 1903, the year Milwaukie was incorporated as a town, Owen Roberts was elected to the first common council and was then elected by his fellow councilors as the first chairman, a position now referred to as Council President. He was instrumental in crafting much of the town's early policies and he was the originator of the first official council motion, having suggested at the first meeting that the town create an official seal. Councilor Roberts passed away unexpectedly in 1905, at the age of 50, due to complications from pneumonia. At the time of his death he was serving as chairman of the town council, and although only a resident of Milwaukie for 12 years, the whole town turned out for his funeral which was presided over by his Odd Fellow lodge. All business was suspended and schools and public buildings flew their flags at half-staff. A similar funeral scene would play out sixty-one years later when his daughter Nell suddenly passed away after years of service to the City. Councilor Roberts was buried in Milwaukie's Pioneer Cemetery. 🐾



Owen Roberts' Blacksmith Shop near the corner of Harrison and 42<sup>nd</sup> (circa 1890s)  
(Photos Courtesy of Milwaukie Historical Society)